

## Lepidoptera in Dordogne, South West France, in May 1974

By R. F. BREThERTON, C.B., M.A., F.R.E.S.

Folly Hill, Birtley Green, Bramley, Guildford, Surrey SG0 0LE

My wife and I stayed from 12th to 27th May 1974 with friends in a converted farmhouse in the small village of St. Cirq, which lies between Le Bugue and Les Eyzies in the department of the Dordogne, South West France. This is limestone country of low hills with many south-facing slopes and narrow valleys, some with water meadows and marshes, in the angle formed by the junction of the rivers Vezère and Dordogne. It has long been famous for its caves, with their paintings and sculptures dating back for perhaps 20,000 years: Les Eyzies is pretentiously described in the guide-books as "the capital of pre-history". The area is also full of mediaeval churches and castles, many of them built when the kings of England were also dukes of Aquitaine. The country has a fine limestone flora, which was at its spring best while we were there, and it is also rich in lepidoptera, though it does not seem to contain any particularly rare species, at least among the butterflies. The climate is Atlantic rather than Mediterranean; we had mixed weather, with short spells of sunshine and warmth alternating with grey skies and rain with cold westerly winds.

I had already briefly sampled the attractions of the district during a stay of three nights at Les Eyzies at the beginning of August 1963, while on the way to the Pyrenees. A very useful list of the Macro-lepidoptera of the region has been published by Monsieur C. Dufay, based on his collecting by day and with a light trap during the six months from April to September 1955. As he says, in so short a time the list could not be made complete, though even so it contains 90 Rhopalocera and 400 Heterocera. I was able to add to it four species of butterflies and three of moths in May 1974.

In all 52 species of Rhopalocera were seen, which are listed at the end of this note. Of these 23 are not now resident or annually immigrant in Britain; two — *Aporia crataegi* L. and *Cyaniris semiargus* Rott., which were just beginning to emerge in abundance, were once British but are now extinct; and a further two — *Colias australis* Vty. and *Nymphalis antiopa* — are occasional immigrants with us. Probably because of the late spring some of the hibernating species, such as *Gonepteryx rhamni* L. and its southern cousin *G. cleopatra* L., were still numerous and in fair condition. But the main interest was the almost daily emergence of new species: our score at the end of the first two days was more than doubled by the end of our stay. The dominant butterfly throughout was the attractive Fritillary *Mellicta parthenoides* Kef., which occurred in vast numbers almost everywhere on the slopes, in the hayfields, and along the road verges. I was lucky to take a splendid male example of ab. *rhoio* Oberthür, in which the hindwings underside have a broad cream-coloured central band instead of the

usual white spots and orange ground colour, while on both surfaces of the forewings the central black markings are wholly lacking. Other Fritillaries were very common: *Melitaea phoebe* Schiff., *M. didyma* Esp., *M. cinxia* L. mostly in the hayfields, *Clossiana euphrosyne* L., with a single *C. dia* L., in the woods, and *M. diamina*, surprisingly early, in the marshes of the Beune Valley above Les Eyzies. Among the other Nymphalines single, worn, examples only of *Nymphalis antiopa* L. and *Araschnia levana* L. were seen, but the Continental White Admiral, *Limenitis reducta* Stdgr., appeared on 15th May and became fairly common later in the week. The two Swallow Tails, *Papilio machaon* L. and *Iphiclides podalirius* L., were often seen even on the terrace of the farm house. *Leptidea sinapis* L. was by far the commonest Pierine, though *Colias australis* Vty. was locally abundant on the steeper slopes; I was glad to take a fresh female of *Pieris mannii* Mayer, which seemed to be rare. Among the Satyrids *Pararge aegeria* L. was notable for its rich orange yellow ground colour: all the specimens seen were fresh, so it seems that the April emergence to which we are accustomed in southern England does not take place in the Dordogne. *Maniola jurtina* L., on the other hand, appeared much earlier than in England: it was first seen on 24th May, and males became common on the two following days, though no females were seen.

Notable among the Lycaenids were the delicate *Everes alcetas* Hffgg., which was locally common, flying along with *Cupido minimus* Fuesl. and quite hard to distinguish from it on the wing. The females of *Lysandra bellargus* Rott. were interesting. I saw none of the bright blue form which occurs rather further north around Angoulême; but all the Dordogne examples examined had a thin sprinkling of blue scales mixed with the brown ones on the upper side of all wings, which gives them a curious steely appearance. Other interesting Blues were *Philotes baton* Bergstr., which was local and not common and very variable in size; *Glaucopsyche alexis* Poda, of which I took a female which was heavily streaked with blue on the upperside; and the brilliant *Plebicula dorylas* Schiff., which was just emerging near Trémolat on our last full day, 27th May.

Of the Skippers *Spialia sertorius* Hffg., with its bright orange underside, was common and conspicuous. *Pyrgus malvae* L., on the other hand, though seen in several places, was rather scarce and hard to catch. This was unfortunate, as I had hoped to collect a good series in order to determine whether there was any overlap in the distribution of the two sub-species (or species), *malvae* L. and *malvoides* Elwes and Ed. Monsieur Dufay states that he found *malvoides* on the south-facing slopes at Vilajou, but that further north at Tamniès in the valley of the Grande Beune he met with *malvae*. I brought back only five males and two females. Of the males, one was taken at Vilajou, one a little further north at Saint Cirq, and three in the Beune Valey. Dissection shows that *all* are unambiguously *malvae*. It therefore seems likely that some

overlap does occur at Vilajou, though I did not myself take the two sub-species flying together. Since *malvae* is usually only single-brooded and *malvoides* double brooded there may be some difference in their dates of emergence and flight in the spring. Other Skippers, which I was surprised to see so early in the season, were *Pyrgus fritillarius* Poda (*carthami* Hubn.), near Les Eyzies on 15th May, and *Ochlodes venata* Br. & Grey, on the 18th.

Our strongest impression was of the great total abundance of Rhopalocera in this Dordogne country, by comparison with the chalk and limestone areas of southern England. Explanation of this contrast must be speculative, but two obvious differences in the environment may be noted as possibly relevant. The first is in agricultural practise. Though the farms are many, they are mostly small and engaged in very various production: tobacco, wine, sheep and cattle, poultry and even rabbits, with little land under the plough. The hills, where they were not wooded, were well but not excessively grazed; and the many hayfields appeared not to be cut all at once but in small areas as grass was needed from day to day — a practise which must help the survival of the enormous numbers of butterflies which obviously breed in them. The second striking difference is the relative rarity of small birds in the area, which may be due to local shooting habits, though there was no evidence of indiscriminate bird slaughter while we were there. We were interested to see that two extensive areas beyond Les Eyzies had been set aside as total nature reserves, in which "la chasse" in any form was forbidden; but for the lepidoptera there seemed to be no need for such precautions.

The butterflies were reinforced by four species of Burnets, *Zygaena trifolii* Esp., *Z. hippocrepidis* Hubn., *Z. loti* Schiff., and *Z. fausta* L., and by a fair showing of other diurnal moths. At night the ordinary electric light outside the house door produced an interesting selection. There were trees of the Large-leafed Lime (*Tilia platyphyllos* Scop.) on the terrace, and several *Drepana harpagula* Esp. duly came to the light. Other interesting species were *Epicnaptera tremulifolia* Hubn., which closely resembles our extinct *E. ilicifolia* L., *Hoplitis milhauseri* F., of which there is only one British record, and the fine Prominent *Ochrostigma vellitaris* Hufn. Our most dramatic capture was that of two male specimens of *Saturnia pyri* Schiff., which is the largest European moth, with a wing expanse of up to six inches. The first, after flying to the porch lamp, caused confusion by trying to intervene in the treatment of a car which had developed a crucial defect. The second, possibly disturbed by a bird, flapped down to the grass on the terrace during a pre-luncheon drinks session and allowed itself to be admired and photographed by the assembled company before capture. The village school mistress told us that a third had entered the school room, interrupted her class, and provoked sundry acts of indiscipline among her 12 pupils. Clearly an excessively self-assertive species!

Other interesting Heterocera noted were *Coscinia cribraria* L., in an almost unmarked white form very different in its appearance, as well as in its emergence date, from our British sub-species; *Cosymbia ruficiliaria* H-S., which looks like an intermediate between *C. porata* L. and *C. punctaria* L., and may possibly be overlooked in Britain; and the fine Boarmid *Synopsia sociaria* Hubn. An example of *Hemaris fuciformis* L. was seen in the Beune Valley: it is not included in M. Dufay's list.

A full list of the Rhopalocera seen between 13th and 26th May 1964, with the dates when they were first seen, is as follows: *Papilio machaon* L., 13.5; *Iphiclides podalirius* L., 14.5; *Pieris brassicae* L., 13.5; *P. rapae* L., 13.5; *P. mannii* Mayer, 18.5, one female only in the Beune Valley; *P. napi* L., 13.5; *Aporia crataegi* L., 20.5, males common at Vilajou and Saint Cirq; *Anthocharis cardamines* L., 13.5; *Leptidea sinapis* L., 13.5; *Colias crocea* Fourc., 25.5., one only, Causse de Gramont; *C. australis* Vty., 13.5, becoming abundant on steep slopes everywhere; *Gonepteryx rhamni* L., 13.5; *G. cleopatra* L., 14.5, Beynac, Saint Cirq, few; *Limenitis reducta* Stdgr., 15.5, Beune Valley, few; \**Nymphalis antiopa* L., 15.5, one only, Beune Valley; *Inachis io* L., 25.5, larvae nearly full-grown; *Vanessa atalanta* L., 20.5, one only; *Aglais urticae* L., 26.5, one worn, also larvae; *Polygonia c-album* L., 15.5, few; *Araschnia levana* L., 21.5, Limeuil, one worn male; *Clossiana euphrosyne* L., 13.5; *C. dia* L., 15.5, Beune Valley, one only; \**Melitaea cinxia* L., 18.5, Saint Cirq, many in hayfields; *M. phoebe* Schiff., 15.5, Saint Cirq., Vilajou, many; *M. didyma* Esp., 18.5; *M. diamina* Lang, 18.5, many males in marshes in Beune Valley; *Mellicta parthenoides* Kef., 13.5, abundant everywhere; *Pararge aegeria* L., 13.5; *Lasiomata megera* L., 13.5; *L. maera* L., 17.5; *Maniola jurtina* L., 24.5, males common; *Coenonympha pamphilus* L., 13.5; *C. arcania* L., 18.5, Saint Cirq, Vilajou, many; *Callophrys rubi* L., 14.5; *Heodes tityrus* Poda, 13.5; *Lycaena phloea* L., 18.5; *Everes alcetas* Hffgg., 14.5, Saint Cirq, Beune Valley, locally common; *Cupido minimus* Fuess., 15.5; *Celastrina argiolus* L., 13.5, Saint Cirq, few; \**Glaucopsyche alexis* Poda, 17.5, Limeuil, Saint Cirq, few; *Philotes baton* Bergstr., 13.5, Saint Cirq, on steep slopes, few; *Aricia agestis* Schiff., 26.5, Beune Valley, common in one place; *Cyaniris semiargus* Rott., 21.5; *Plebicula dorylas* Schiff., 26.5, Trémolat, males only; *Lysandra bellargus* Rott., 13.5, abundant on slopes and in hayfields; *Polyommatus icarus* Rott., 18.5; *Hamearis lucina* L., 20.5, Vilajou, few; *Pyrgus malvae* L., 15.5, Saint Cirq, Vilajou, Beune Valley; *P. fritillarius* Poda 15.5, Beune Valley, Saint Cirq, few; *Spialia sertorius* Hffgg., 15.5, very common on slopes; *Erynnis tages* L., 13.5; *Ochlodes venata* Br. & Grey, 18.5.

The following additional species were noted in the region 1st/3rd August 1963: *Pontia daplidice* L., *Argynnis paphia* L., *Vanessa cardui* L., *Melanargia galathea* L., *Minois dryas* Scop., *Pyronia tithonus* L., *Everes argiades* Pall., *Lysandra coridon* (Species marked \* are not mentioned in M. Dufay's list.)

Poda, *Carcharodus flocciferus* Z., *Thymelicus sylvestris* Poda.

We returned from St. Cirq as we had come to it, by driving our car for 400 miles to and from Le Havre and using the night ferry to Southampton, with a night's stop on each journey in the Loire Valley to visit some of the chateaux. I had hoped to do some useful collecting on the way. But on the outward journey we had rain and grey skies until we were nearing the Dordogne, and even then saw few butterflies in the forests, which mostly still showed signs of damage from late frosts. On the return journey the weather was also poor, but a short stop on the edge of a marshy wood near Sées in Normandy gave me a pair of the Skipper *Carterocephalus palaemon* Pall. and a fine female *Mellicta parthenoides* Kef., which must be there near its north western limit.

#### Reference

Dufay, C. (1955). Les Lepidopteres du Périgord noir: I—“Macrolépidoptères” de la Région des Eyzies (Dordogne). *Rev. franc. Lépidoptérologie*, 15: 89-102.

### Among the British Lepidoptera, 1973

By B. G. WITHERS, B.Sc.

“Onaway”, 18 Broadstone Road, Harpenden, Herts., AL5 1RG

The beginning of the year was remarkable for its mild weather, and my first foray on 29th January was to Nomansland Common, two miles from my home, armed with only a flashlight. The mild conditions had caused a curiously premature emergence of *Agriopsis marginaria* F. along with many *Theria rupicapraria* D. & S.; and two males of *Apocheima pilosaria* D. & S. actually flew to the feeble beam of my torch. On subsequent evenings the same species were noted in considerable numbers in this and other nearby localities. My first outing with the portable m.v. turned out to be a traumatic experience to say the least! The date in question was 19th February and the location again Nomansland Common. Operations commenced at 6.00 p.m. and by 6.45 moths were flocking to the light, these including *Eupsilia transversa* Hufn., *Conistra vaccinii* L., an abundance of *A. pilosaria*, including five melanic specimens, and several *Agriopsis leucophaearia* D. & S., among which were several melanic specimens and one fine example of the form *marmorinaria*. At 7.15, deciding to leave the equipment running while I returned home for a quickly snatched meal, I was horrified on my return to find that the generator (with the exception of the petrol filler cap), choke and m.v. lamp had vanished into thin air! The rest of the evening was spent contacting the police and combing the area for signs of the truant equipment. However, it was not until the next day that it was found by a local inhabitant and handed over to the police; it had been thrown in the bushes by some well-wisher or other, but was fortunately little the worse for its adventure. But this time, the story had reached the ears of the local press and this culminated in the hirsute physiognomy of Yours Truly appearing on the front page of the local newspaper—fame at